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Public health part of homeland security threat assessment

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Download the paper: "Paper: The Technology of a Health Threat Assessment"

Beverly Pritchett calls for applying the same type of threat assessments that are used in the police and terrorism world to public health concerns.

Her course paper in Technology for Homeland Security was titled "The Technology of a Health Threat Assessment." The concept would bring together agencies to incorporate health threat intelligence at fusion centers that track and analyze potential terrorist and criminal activity or trends.

"A Health Threat Assessment is a tool for prevention of disease and injury through the recognition of sentinel or patterns within data that provide indications of impending harm," wrote Pritchett, who is Senior Deputy Director, Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Administration at the Washington, D.C., Department of Health. "It can assist in developing policy and response plans."

Pritchett expanded on her course paper in her thesis, titled "Qualia: A Prescription for Developing a Quality Health Threat Assessment."

1) In her course paper, Pritchett states that fusion centers should incorporate public health analyses in their assessments.

She notes that the Defense Department uses such a process, but it has not been a standard practice among public health agencies. The paper points out that a of myriad agencies collect health information in the Washington, D.C., area, then goes on to describe methods that could be used to consolidate, store, share and disseminate potential health threats.

The paper sets forth, with use of flowcharts, how such an approach would work and offers supporting literature on knowledge management organization. It also examines some of the technological methods that may be used to collect and distribute information, such as data mining and social networking.

Pritchett believes a combination of such approaches would be ideal.

2) Pritchett continued with the same theme in writing her thesis. While the technology course paper centered on how to gather and store information with the available technology, the thesis progressed to addressing how to analyze and assess that data by pulling together representatives from disciplines outside public health, such as law enforcement or fire safety.

"Pulling those ideas together give you a different picture of each piece of information that comes in," Pritchett noted. "A fire professional has a different perspective on a piece of data compared with law enforcement or public health."

3) The Washington, D.C., Health Department is teaming with the Department of Homeland Security in crafting a public health intelligence bulletin that communicates local information that may be relevant in other regions.

A current example is the salmonella outbreak. Information on the outbreak from Maryland, for example, may be beneficial to public health practitioners in New Jersey.

On another front, public health professionals are working with other District agencies in developing Priority Information Needs, or PINs for special events that occur throughout the tourist season in DC. These PINs provide both intelligence analysts and operations personnel with cues for events that may indicate a situation that could

develop into a public health threat during the special event. “I think the interesting thing is that when we share information and ideas across disciplines we tend to come up with a different picture,” she said. “We look at same thing – where the 180 buses will be parked — but we all look at it with a different lens on the threat that it might pose.”

Associated file: [Paper: The Technology of a Health Threat Assessment](#)

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